

An Exploratory Study of Honor Crimes in the United States

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Published online: 14 January 2016
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Abstract There is a lack of research on honor crimes within the United States. We used an open source search methodology to identify the victim-offender relationship and motivations for this crime within the United States. Using data collected based on the protocol for the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), we identified a total of 16 honor crimes with 40 victims that occurred between January 1st 1990 and December 31st 2014 in the United States. Based on our findings, the overarching motivations for honor crimes in the United States were the perpetrator's former partner beginning the process of separation and the westernized behavior of the victim, typically the offender's daughter or step-daughter. Honor crimes were not limited to current/former intimate partners or daughters, as they also included the death of extended family members (e.g. in-laws, nieces, and cousins). Policy implications and directions for future research on honor crimes are discussed.

Keywords Honor killing · Honor crime · Extremist crime · Intimate partner violence · Domestic violence

Violence against women is a worldwide health problem that can affect anyone regardless of race, ethnicity, class, culture or sexual orientation (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). Some estimate that annually, between a third to half of murdered women worldwide have been killed by a current or former intimate partner (Brock 2003; Campbell et al. 2003; Fox 2005; Stöckl et al. 2013), with women six to nine times more likely than men to be killed by someone they know (Brock 2003; Stöckl et al. 2013). Violence against women is not uni-dimensional because females suffer different forms and severity of abuse depending on their culture, age, socioeconomic class, marital status, immigration status, and race (Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997a, b; Raj and Silverman 2002; Sokoloff 2008). Honor crimes have been conceptualized as one segment of domestic, intimate partner and family violence cases that allegedly justify the murder based on the victim's perceived behaviors that impact the family's honor (Araji and Carlson 2001; Gill 2009).

Although honor crimes generate attention from the media and policy makers, academic studies have been rare and typically focused on cases outside the United States (e.g. Turkey, Jordan) (see for e.g., Doğan 2014a, b, c; Kulwicki 2002). Honor crimes have been defined as homicides where a perpetrator commits murder in an attempt to restore honor to his or her family in response to the victim's perceived misbehaviors (AHA Foundation 2012). The offenders in these situations believe that the victim's behaviors have shamed their kin network by violating their cultural norms. Action, usually in the form of violence, must be taken to restore the offender's and the family's honor (Gill 2008).

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While there has been an increase in studies on honor crimes (Kulczycki and Windle 2011), there remains a lack of research on the characteristics of honor crimes in the United States. The current study used open sources, which are those that are available to the public (e.g. newspapers, court decisions), to identify all known honor crimes that have occurred in the United States between January 1st 1990 and December 31st 2014. We used the open source search protocol created by the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) study (see Freilich et al. 2014) to collect data. In our analyses we focused on the victim-offender relationship and the motivation for the honor crime. We investigated the dynamics of honor crimes in the United States to provide direction for future research. We also set forth a brief discussion of the policy implications of our findings.

Honor Crimes

Honor crimes have been operationalized as offenses where male family members attack a woman because she “violated the honor of her family” (Kulwicki 2002, p. 77). There are three components to this definition. First, the victim engaged in, or was mistakenly thought to have engaged in, behavior that her family and community perceived as unacceptable, including but not limited to marital infidelity, premarital sex, showing autonomy, being too independent or westernized (Chesler 2010; Cooney 2014; Kulczycki and Windle 2011). Second, honor crimes derive from the belief that women belong to, or are beholden to, men. To restore the family’s honor that was shamed due to the woman’s perceived transgression, she must be punished (Sen 2005). Therefore, the last criterion is that the woman is attacked and this includes both fatal and non-fatal incidents (Cooney 2014; Gill 2008). These attacks have been premised on attitudinal and/or cultural justifications that legitimize violence against women due to the subordinate status of women within a patriarchal societal structure (Baker et al. 1999).

Though some studies have reported that women are equally or more likely to have engaged in physical assaults against their intimate partner (Dutton 2006; Straus 1979, 1993), other researchers have found that men and women engaged in physical abuse for different reasons; and the effects of violence have been more severe for women (Archer 2000; Johnson 1995; Johnson and Ferraro 2000; Saunders 2002). Abuse against an intimate partner is not limited to physical violence, but also includes psychological/emotional abuse and controlling behavior (Jaffe et al. 2008; Johnson 1995; Stark 2007). Researchers have noted that abusive men justify violence and controlling behaviors in intimate relationships by relying on societal norms that reinforce the gender hierarchy (DeKeseredy 2011; Holtzworth-Munroe 2005; Holtzworth-Munroe et al. 1997a, b; Stark 2007). We argue that honor crimes are an extension of the intimate partner abuse framework, with perpetrators

justifying their power and control by relying on norms (emanating from their interpretation of their culture or religion) that see women as beholden to men and their kin network.

Honor crimes are committed worldwide (Baker et al. 1999; Gill 2008; 2009; Ortner 1978), with an estimated 5000 women and children murdered each year in attempt by the offender to restore the honor of his/her family (UNFPA 2000). This estimate likely underreports the true rate of honor crimes since many cases may be classified as suicides, “regular” (non-honor) homicides, or accidents (Wiken 2008). The murder of women cuts across cultures and religions, with patriarchal and other cultures that have different understandings of honor and shame reporting increased rates of honor crimes (Doğan 2011; Gill 2008). Though honor crimes have typically been associated with Arab and Middle Eastern culture (Coomaraswamy 2005), dowry murders and crimes of passion have also been premised on the inferior status of women in the wider culture (Sen 2005; Standish 2013). The concept of honor, especially in the context of the Middle East, has been “tied closely to the reputations and sexual conduct of women in his family.... Any breach or suspected breach of sexual codes by these women is viewed as a potent assault on the man’s honor... [and] such an assault results in shame” (Araji and Carlson 2001, p. 590). To restore the offender or family’s honor, the woman must be punished, which can include killing her. Because of cultural variations worldwide, the feelings of honor and shame may be manifested in different ways, but are ultimately driven by the desire to control female behavior (Baker et al. 1999). Control of female behavior underscores the justification of honor crimes and has been provided as a justification of women abuse (Baker et al. 1999; Johnson 1995; Stark 2007), highlighting the connection between the study of honor crimes and intimate partner violence.

Having briefly discussed honor crimes worldwide, there is reason to expect that the justifications for honor crimes in the United States may differ from those committed abroad. Honor in the United States, and in Western norms, has been considered an individual attribute, while individuals who adhere to traditional cultures believe honor rests on the family unit (Baker et al. 1999; Uskel et al. 2012), or that a male’s honor is dependent not only on his behavior but also the behavior of female relatives (Doğan 2011). It is possible that an individual can adhere to these cultural ideals that reinforce male privilege, even when the larger cultural context that the individual lives in does not necessarily support them.

Regardless, the cultural underpinnings of a nation leave behind important footprints that may persist, and individuals may carry their cultural heritage when immigrating to another country (Inglehart and Baker 2000). Even in an individualistic nation like the United States, it is possible groups of individuals rely on their cultural heritage to define honor. Yet, in an industrialized nation, the perpetrator may not always be aware of the victim’s perceived transgressions; there may be other behaviors the offender interprets as perceived transgressions of cultural norms.

American honor crimes may, thus, differ from honor crimes committed abroad due to these cultural variations in the interpretation of honor. In prior research, brothers accounted for 60 % of honor crime perpetrators in Jordan, and extended kin have been more likely to partake in honor crimes outside the United States (Kulwicksi 2002). We suspect that the relationship between the victim and offender in American honor crimes will be more likely to include intimate partners and less likely to involve extended kin, because honor is seen as an individual attribute in Western nations.

Another important issue is then identifying the motivation for the honor crime. According to Kulwicksi (2002), the perpetrator's motivation for an honor crime in Jordan was almost exclusively the alleged sexual misconduct of the female victim. These behaviors included premarital or extramarital sex, questionable reputation and/or prostitution. Given 87 % of Jordanian honor crimes were committed by male family members and not the spouse or former partner, sexual jealousy did not motivate the honor crime (Kulwicksi 2002). Instead, the motivation stemmed from shame brought on the family for the female's alleged transgression that affected the male's honor (Araji and Carlson 2001).

While the shame was not necessary tied to Islamic or Middle Eastern beliefs, it has increasingly been associated with such beliefs because they have maintained aspects of patrilineal cultural beliefs (Anderson et al. 1998; Bates and Rassam 1983; Doğan 2011; Gill 2009). These cultural norms assume that husbands and male kin should control female kin members while stressing the importance of maintaining honor and avoiding shame (Doğan 2011; Kulwicksi 2002). Unlike individualistic societies, such as the United States, the female's honor cannot be claimed as her own because her behavior defines the honor of the entire family (Baker et al. 1999). Offenders may maintain cultural values while living in a new country, and it is likely that their cultural heritage affects their attitudes and behavior. In the current study, we used open source data that we collected to explore not only the victim-offender relationship, but also if the motivation for honor crimes went beyond the victim's sexual behaviors. This included females who demonstrated autonomy, or were perceived by offenders as too independent or westernized (Chesler 2010; Cooney 2014; Kulczycki and Windle 2011).

Methodological Issues in the Study of Honor Crimes

Despite the importance of honor crimes, academic research has rarely engaged this topic systematically in the United States. Research has tended to focus on case studies (e.g. Glazer and Abu Ras 1994), community studies (Gill et al. 2012), attitudes toward honor crimes (Eisner and Ghuneim 2013; Uskel et al. 2012; Vandello and Cohen 2003), or honor crimes outside the United States (Doğan 2014a, b, c; Kulwicksi 2002; Kulczycki and Windle 2011; Sev'er and Yurdakul 2001).

Studies on honor crimes have been difficult to conduct because of validity and reliability issues associated with data collection (Kulczycki and Windle 2011). Ethnographic studies on how honor crimes are handled have suffered from unsystematic observations and lack of representativeness (Cooney 2014). Kulwicksi (2002) used Jordanian court records to collect data on honor attacks within the country. Only 16 of Kulwicksi's (2002) 23 identified honor cases had documentation in the court records available to be included in the analysis.

Since the United States does not have a centralized court record facility, it would not be feasible to rely upon this source to systematically collect information on honor crimes. It would also be difficult to conduct surveys in the United States targeting the residential population to identify the family members of honor crimes victims, as is done with the victims of street crimes (Chermak et al. 2012). An alternative data collection method would be to purposefully identify the victims' families and then interview them (Block et al. 1999). There are limitations with this method to study honor crimes, as well, since offenders of honor crimes are invariably family members of the victims. In addition, collecting information on honor crimes by interviewing the offenders of these homicides also has limitations. Weaknesses of this method includes opportunity sampling, and that the interviewer's presence may prevent the respondent from answering honestly about sensitive issues such as honor crimes (Silke 2001).

Another alternative is to use archival data, such as the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) Supplementary Homicide Reports (SHR). The SHR is not collected on an incident basis and is limited in the number of variables that are collected. SHR does not note if the crime was or was not an honor crime, nor does it collect information on key variables of interest (e.g. motivation; relationship between perpetrator and victim). While the FBI's National Incident Based Recording System (NIBRS) tracks homicides and includes a much larger number of attributes than the SHR, it, unfortunately, suffers from a series of well-known reporting problems and would likely miss cases that should have been included (Parkin 2012; Parkin and Freilich 2015). Moreover, if the offender commits suicide after murdering the victim(s) the case would not appear in police or court documents.

Open source documents are another avenue to identify the occurrence of honor crimes in the United States. Open source data refer to information that is publicly available. In addition to the weaknesses of other sources, homicides in the United States have been more likely to be covered by the media and other open sources compared to other types of attacks (Chermak 1995; Chermak and Gruenewald 2006). These sources include, but are not limited to, media reports, official sources, reports by NGOs and watch-groups, scholarly case studies, and published chronologies and listings of certain kinds of crimes (such as extremist related offenses, ideologically motivated crimes). Most of this information is online in

electronic form and searchable (Chermak et al. 2012). For instance, almost all media outlets have an online presence and often have more information available via the Internet than in their print editions. Significantly, media reporters in the United States may be more inclined to cover honor crimes, especially those committed by Middle Easterners, compared to other fatal crimes, because they may be perceived as more “exotic” and newsworthy and fit the media’s stereotypical expectations (Chermak 2002; Chermak and Gruenewald 2006). But, open sources are not limited to this. Court records and other government and official records from other entities may not be in electronic form but can be made searchable. Given the limitations associated with other sources of homicide data, a systematic search of open sources has the potential to identify murders that fit this study’s criteria of an honor crime (Chermak et al. 2012), while also providing rich detail on the event that allows for analyses.

Aims of the Study

This study’s overarching goal was to identify and describe the characteristics of American honor crimes over a 24-year period (January 1st 1990 to December 31st 2014.) Secondary aims included examining the victim-offender relationship and assessing if motivations focus exclusively on female sexual behaviors or expand to individualistic behaviors that offenders perceive bring shame to the family (Baker et al. 1999; Doğan 2011; Uskel et al. 2012). We relied upon the ECDB’s identification system and open source search protocol (Freilich et al. 2014) to identify honor crimes in the United States.

Data

The United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) study uses open-source materials to identify violent and financial crimes committed by political extremists in the United States and has also focused on honor crimes in the United States. The ECDB is a relational database that houses variables at different levels of analysis, such as the incident, offender, victim, and location levels. The ECDB’s incident identification and coding is a multi-stage process (Freilich et al. 2014) and was used to identify honor crimes in the United States. First, open-sources were used to identify cases that fit the inclusion criteria. These sources include, but are not limited to watch-groups, official sources, and scholarly accounts.¹ Additional incidents were identified in online newspapers, which were

searched using keywords such as ‘honor crime’, ‘honour crime’ and ‘honor killing.’ Due to the identification process used by the ECDB, the risk of inclusion and exclusion errors were minimized, especially when compared to other sources and databases used to study terrorism and extremist crime (Chermak et al. 2012).²

Once incidents were identified we searched more than 30 web-engines and databases to collect all publically available information on the honor crime event.³ All publically available information was copied into a Word document. Data was systematically extracted from the document based on the pre-existing coding scheme of the ECDB relational database. The first author coded variables related to the incident, the offenders, the victims, and the reliability of the open-source documentation for these honor crimes (Freilich et al. 2014; Gruenewald 2011).⁴

² We recently looked at 10 sources (such as the FBI, the Anti-Defamation League, etc.) that the ECDB had used to identify homicides committed by far-right extremists in the United States between 1990 and 2010 (Chermak et al. 2012). After examining these sources similarities and differences, we normalized their inclusion criteria to accurately assess variations in the events they included. We used a “catchment-re-catchment” analysis and found that the inclusion of additional sources resulted in an increasing number of events that were identified in previous sources. Further, the ECDB’s use of key word searches identified over 10 cases that should have been included but yet were missed by all the other sources. Thus, the ECDB’s strategy of using multiple sources- and ideally all relevant sources- to identify the cases interested in minimized the danger of selectivity bias and resulted in a more complete universe.

³ These web-engines include: 1. Lexis-Nexis; 2. Proquest; 3. Yahoo; 4. Google; 5. Copernic; 6. News Library; 7. Westlaw; 8. Google Scholar (both articles & legal opinions); 9. Amazon; 10. Google U.S. Government; 11. Federation of American Scientists; 12. Google Video; 13. Center for the Study of Intelligence; 14. Surf Wax; 15. Dogpile; 16. Mamma; 17. Librarians’ Internet Index; 18. Scirus; 19. All the Web; 20. Google News; 21. Google Blog; 22. Homeland Security Digital Library; 23. Vinelink; 24. The inmate locator; 25. Bureau of Prisons; 26. Individual State Department of Corrections (DOCs); 27. Blackbookonline.info; 28. Quantloos; 29. Anti-Defamation League; 30. Southern Poverty Law Center; and 31. Center on Law and Security

⁴ Freilich et al. (2014) explained how the larger ECDB study that relies upon multiple coders addressed inter-rater reliability. They write that “we addressed this important issue in a number of ways. First, coders were trained. New coders initially coded previously coded cases and both sets of values were compared. We created a listserv of ECDB personnel and instructed coders to share difficult issues. In this way, inconsistencies were addressed early in the coding process. Second, coding abnormalities were continually checked across coders. Third, filling in values for certain ECDB variables required little interpretation as the variables captured basic facts such as a suspect’s race, age, or gender. we [also] conducted an initial measurement of inter-rater reliability for selected individual and situational characteristics of far-right homicides and found coder agreement between 89 % and 98 % of the time. When coders disagreed it was usually not because of differences in the values coded, but because one coder found a document that contained information that could be coded, while the second coder did not find it (p. 374–375).” Importantly, as noted, we conducted multiple open source searches of each of our 16 honor killings to insure that we did not miss important information. In addition, all the authors participated in the training of coders, and all the points noted in this footnote.

¹ Freilich et al. (2014) provide an appendix that lists these sources. For a detailed discussion of the incident identification process, see Chermak et al. (2012), Freilich et al. (2014); Gruenewald (2011), and Gruenewald & Pridemore (2012).

Inclusion Criteria

Our inclusion criteria were based upon the definition of honor crimes adapted from the AHA Foundation (2012) and included five elements. First, a homicide (i.e. an intentional unlawful killing of another person) was committed in the United States. Second, this homicide was committed between January 1st 1990 and December 31st 2014. Third, the victim was targeted due to their actual or perceived behavior deemed shameful by the perpetrator or their community. “Shameful” behaviors included dressing in Western attire, wearing make-up, dating or having male friends, resisting a forced marriage, or seeking a divorce. Fourth, the perpetrator was motivated to commit this homicide to protect or regain the perceived honor of his/her family, community or themselves (i.e., the perpetrator’s honor). Fifth, the perpetrator believed the victim’s death would accomplish some social goal (revenge, warning, etc.) All five of these requirements had to be satisfied for a homicide to be classified as an honor crime and included in this study. We, thus, excluded domestic violence murders that did not satisfy these five requirements.

We also took steps to validate the data, reduce missing values, and increase reliability. In addition to initial identification, searching and coding strategies discussed above, the first author conducted targeted follow up searches that utilized court documents, department of corrections websites, ancestry databases, and online news aggregators to fill in missing values and confirm existing values.⁵ These sources were searched using victim and offender names and dates of birth and/or death. We also conducted targeted follow-up searches that specifically sought to identify honor crimes that may have been classified as dowry murders.⁶ Interestingly, none of these searches produced additional incidents. We return to this point in the discussion section below. By having the first author complete all the coding, we insured that all identification procedures, inclusion criteria, open source searches, and coding rules were consistently followed when filling in values of our incident, perpetrator, and victim attributes.

We also addressed source type reliability issues. Our open source searches occasionally uncovered documents from different source types containing conflicting information. In these situations, greater weight was granted to the more “trusted” sources. Similar to Sageman (2004, p. 65) “in decreasing degrees of reliability... [we favor] court proceedings

subject to cross examination, followed by reports of court proceedings, then corroborated information from people with direct access to information provided, uncorroborated statements from people with that access, and finally statements from people who had heard the information secondhand.” Table 1 lists the source types by decreasing degree of reliability.

Analysis

There were 16 honor crimes that satisfied our inclusion criteria. In all cases, a family member (e.g. intimate partner, children, mother or father) was murdered because of the “shameful” behavior of a current or former intimate partner, child and/or family member. Given the small number of incidents and the exploratory nature of this study, statistical analyses were not conducted. Instead, we used the ECDB’s pre-specified codes, which capture the victim-offender relationship and motivation for the homicide.⁷ First, we grouped the honor crime victims into three primary categories (i) daughter/stepdaughter was the target, (ii) spouse/partner was the target, (iii) or another family member (e.g. cousins) was the target. These organizational categories allowed us to sort the data (Maxwell 2005) and identify categories within the primary groupings. To do this, we referred back to the open-source material to uncover statements that identified the motivation for the homicide. Below, direct quotes from the open-source materials collected have been presented for some of the cases to contextualize the phenomenon and provide a richer description. We then connected the data to theoretical categories to unpack the offender’s motivation within a more general context (Maxwell 2005).

Findings

The 16 cases that met our inclusion criteria for honor crimes can be found in Table 2. Within this table a short description of the incident is included along with the relationship between the offender and murder victim(s).

Included in Table 3 is the relationship between the murder victim(s) and the perpetrator. Overall, there were 40 victims across the 16 cases. The most frequent victim was the perpetrator’s daughter (N = 9), followed by his current wife (N = 5), niece (N = 4), and estranged wife (N = 3). We disaggregated these findings across the victim-offender relationship to highlight the complexity of these cases. For example, an offender expressed that he murdered his estranged wife because his daughter was dating a Non-Muslim, not because of the

⁵ Databases that were searched included state, local, and federal inmate locators; online local court dockets; the social security death index; and online national record aggregators such as Ancestry.com, Archives.com, BeenVerified.com and other news aggregates. If the case was missing the victim’s date of birth for instance, in Google the coder would search “Victim’s Name” and “date of birth” to find information on the missing values.

⁶ All web-engines were searched using key terms such as “dowry murders” “Indian honor crime” and “Indian honor killing” in conjunction with “United States”.

⁷ For a more detailed description of the coding of variables, see Freilich et al. (2014). All coding is conducted in an Access database.

Table 1 Ranking of Sources by Degree of Reliability

1. Appellate court proceedings
2. Court proceedings subject to cross examination (e.g., trial transcripts)
3. Court proceedings or documents not subject to cross examination (e.g., indictments)
4. Corroborated information from people with direct access to information provided (e.g., law enforcement and other key informants)
5. Uncorroborated statements from people with that access
6. Media reports
7. Watch-group reports
8. Personal views expressed in blogs, websites, editorials, op-eds, etc.

separation. This finding demonstrated the importance of considering the motivation of the offense along with the relationship between the victim and offender.

Honor crimes were almost equally divided between daughters murdered by fathers or stepfathers and women murdered by their current or former partner. First, we review the characteristics of honor crimes with child victims. Next, we discuss honor crimes where current or former intimate partners of the perpetrator were murdered. Third, we focus on honor crimes that involved extended family members.

Honor Crimes with Child Victims

Nine of the 16 honor crime cases (56.3 %) resulted in the death of children by a father or stepfather. The motivation for five of these cases was premised on the daughter's behavior and included incidents where the father feared his daughter was becoming westernized ($N = 3$), the daughter resisted an

arranged marriage ($N = 1$), or the daughter dated a Non-Muslim ($N = 1$). In the remaining four cases, the father expressed that he murdered the children because of their mother's behavior. Overall, the dynamics of these five cases highlighted that the perpetrator perceived the victim's westernized behavior had brought shame to the family and that he justified his violent behavior against his daughter or step daughter by turning to religious and cultural doctrines. Direct quotes from the perpetrator who murdered his daughter when she resisted an arranged marriage showcase this justification. According to CNN on July 9, 2008, when the father of one victim was on trial he told the judge "he had done nothing wrong" and justified his behavior by saying his religion is against divorce (CNN 2008). Furthermore, ABC News on July 7, 2008 reported the perpetrator's wife in this case told police that her daughter did not want to remain in the arranged marriage and that it "caused a great deal of friction between the victim and father" (Schoetz 2008, p. 1). This case highlights the dishonor the offender perceived the victim's behavior brought to the family.

The second motivation for honor crimes where children were murdered was based on the mother's behavior. Two of the nine cases that resulted in the death of children by a father were premised on the behavior of the child's mother while the child was in utero. In the first case, Burman (2002) reported that the perpetrator killed his pregnant wife, mother-in-law and sister-in-law because his wife would not convert to Islam and that the couple also argued over the religion of their unborn twins. In the other case, it was stated that the father justified the murder of his mother, two nieces, infant son, wife, and his unborn child because his former partner and family

Table 2 Relationship among victim and offender and outcome for honor crimes in the United States. (Incident $N = 16$)

	Daughter/ Children	Wife/Former Partner	Other Family Members	Cousins
Cousin too westernized				Died
Daughters too Americanized	Died			
Daughter Resists Arranged Marriage	Died			
Daughter too westernized	Died			
Daughter was sexually molested	Assault	Died		
Step-daughter too westernized	Died			
Daughter dating a Non-Muslim	Died	Died	Died	
Seeking Divorce	Died	Assault	Died	
Seeking Divorce		Died		
Seeking Divorce		Died		
Seeking Divorce		Died	Died	
Wife did not make goat dinner		Died		
Pregnant wife would not convert to Islam	Died	Died	Died	
Pregnant wife would not wear Muslim clothes	Died	Died	Died	
Former partner disrespected him	Died	Assault		
Former partner ended relationship because of religious differences			Died	

Table 3 The relationship between American honor crime victims and the offender (N = 40)

Murdered Victim's Relationship to the Murderer	Frequency
Daughter	9
Wife	5
Niece	4
Estranged wife	3
Son	3
Unborn children	3
Sister-in-law	3
Mother-in-law	3
Stepdaughter	1
Mother	1
Brother-in-law	1
Cousin	1
Unborn niece or nephew	1
Ex-girlfriend's sister	1
Ex-girlfriend's father	1

“disrespected him” by not joining his religion (Chicago Tribune 2011). It is possible the perpetrator rationalized the murder of the children by viewing them as an extension of the mother and her behavior (Goetz et al. 2008).

It was reported that one father committed suicide after murdering his daughter and mother-in-law because his wife was moving to a new house that day (Dowdy 2009). In the final case with child victims, it was stated that the father murdered the children, but not their mother, because his former wife “disrespected him” (Barrouquere 2006). This case stands in contrast to the remaining cases where the perceived transgressor was the primary victim targeted and attacked. Importantly, there was one additional case where the children were assaulted, but not murdered. It was purported that the offender murdered his wife and assaulted his daughters after learning his daughter and wife had been sexually molested. In these cases, the offender attempted to restore honor based on the mother’s alleged misconduct that the offender perceived as shaming the family.

Honor Crimes Where Partners Were Murdered

The primary motivations expressed for the honor crimes where current or former partners were murdered included divorce/separation (N = 3), westernized behavior or violation of cultural ideals (N = 2), not preparing the offender’s preferred dinner (N = 1) and the perceived behavior of the victim’s daughter (N = 2).

In one case, the offender beheaded his wife days after she filed for divorce. As cited in CNN articles from February 16, 2009 and February 17, 2009, the offender went to the police station and reported that he found the body at his office, which

was a local TV station designed to counter stereotypes of Middle Eastern individuals following September 11th (Broughton 2009; Brunswick and Collins 2009). The District Attorney told newspapers this case was an example of domestic violence, as there was a history of abuse between the offender and victim. The victim and offender’s religion played an important role in this crime being cast as an honor crime in the media, as co-workers said he would adhere to traditional practices of the religion even if he was not devout. According to Pipes (2009) of Religion News Blog, “police found he repeatedly told his wife that she had no right, under Islamic law, to divorce him.” He also stated, because she was beheaded, she “could not reach paradise” (Pipes 2009). In the above statements, the offender believed the divorce brought shame upon his family and relied on religion to justify his crime, regardless of the prior history of abuse. The method in which the offender murdered the victim in this case was tied to certain cultural ideals about the afterlife.

Our findings showed offenders premised the murder of pregnant wives based on their behavior the perpetrator perceived violated cultural ideals. In both cases, family members and unborn children were also murdered along with the female intimate partner. The last two women who were murdered by their current or former intimate partner had children who engaged in behavior the perpetrator did not approve of (e. g. dating a Non-Muslim and potential sexual molestation). Finally, there were two cases in which the offender’s former partner was assaulted for wanting a divorce or ending the relationship, but her family members were the ones ultimately killed. These cases highlight the complexity of honor crimes when multiple people were killed. Determining the motivation behind the crime goes beyond identifying who the victims were.

Honor Crimes Involving Extended Family Members

Our findings concluded that six honor crimes resulted in the death of at least one extended family member. In three cases, it was reported that family members were murdered because the offender’s intimate partner was seeking a divorce or the daughter was in the process of ending the relationship with the perpetrator. In the other three cases, it was expressed that family members were murdered because the perpetrator interpreted either his intimate partner or his daughter’s behavior as westernized.

Instead, only one case involved the murder of a female teenager by her male cousins. As noted in the Associated Press article on June 8, 1999, it was reported that the victim in this case was killed because her cousins concluded she was becoming too westernized and that their “religious beliefs superseded the law” (Kropko 1999). Though researchers have discussed how other family members become involved in the honor crime (Kulwicki 2002), this is the only case our search

identified where extended family members were the ones to commit the honor crime. Given the individualistic nature of the United States, it is possible that extended family members can no longer claim the behavior of others as their own. Therefore, our findings indicated that perpetrators of American honor crimes are more likely to be a member of the victim's nuclear family.

Discussion

Our study identified 16 honor crimes with 40 murder victims that occurred between January 1, 1990 and December 31st 2014 in the United States. While our findings are exploratory in nature, they extend the literature on honor crimes by first using a validated protocol to identify all publicly reported honor crimes, and then identifying the victim-offender relationship and motivations for these crimes in the United States. Our findings indicated victims of American honor crimes include intimate partners, children, and extended family members. Consistent with honor crimes committed in Turkey, the number of victims exceeded the number of overall incidents (Doğan 2014a). Prior research has shown brothers and fathers are the primary perpetrators of Jordanian honor crimes (Kulwicksi 2002), while there was more diversity in victim-offender relationships for Turkish honor crimes (Doğan 2014a). Indeed, the victim's husband committed 36 % of the honor crimes in Turkey. Honor crimes in the United States were more likely to involve fathers and current or former intimate partners as perpetrators. A brother did not perpetrate any of the honor crimes in the United States. Comparatively, brothers accounted for 60 % of honor crime perpetrators in Jordan (Kulwicksi 2002).

Doğan (2014a) has attempted to explain this discrepancy by looking to the shift in Turkish woman's honor from her birth family to her husband after marriage. The preliminary findings from this study also indicated about half of the perpetrators were the current or former intimate partner of the victim. In the United States, "control" shifts to the female's intimate partner when she leaves her family of origin (Baker et al. 1999). Cross-national work can illuminate how honor and shame impact the perpetration of these crimes, especially the relationship between the offender and victim.

Prior work on the concept of honor (Araji and Carlson 2001) and motivations underlying honor crimes outside the United States has centered on the sexual behavior of the victim (Gill 2009; Kulwicksi 2002). Overall, our findings indicated the primary motivations for honor crimes were divorce/separation and the perceived westernized behavior of the victim by the perpetrator. Based on the data collected in this study, honor crimes within the United States did not focus exclusively on the sexual behavior of the victim and included shame brought about by the offender's interpretation and

perception of the victim's behavior as westernized (Chesler 2010; Cooney 2014). Based on these findings, the focus must shift beyond the sexual behavior of women to include other behaviors that offenders perceive as bringing dishonor and shame, used to justify committing an honor crime.

Compared to prior research, our findings indicated that motivations for honor crimes involving children have a broader range of justifications and were also more likely to involve fathers as the perpetrators (Doğan 2014a; Kulwicksi 2002). The individuality associated with adolescence is unique to westernized post-industrial nations. As teens begin to develop an identity (Erikson 1968) in a culture different from their parents, daughters and fathers' cultural beliefs may clash. Without recognition of this culture difference that allows potential perpetrators to view perceived cultural transgressions as attacks on their honor, cases may not be classified as an honor crime because they lack perceived sexual misconduct.

In addition, our findings showed that offenders also murdered unborn children. The perpetrator may have justified the murder of the unborn child through the in utero connection between mother and child. Intimate partner homicide may be the result of male sexual jealousy that arises from paternity uncertainty (Goetz et al. 2008). It is possible the perpetrator justified the murder of the unborn child as an extension of the mother's behavior. In other words, doubts about her sexual fidelity or commitment to the culture and/or religion, may also lead to doubt about paternity.

The other half of cases in this study included victim-offender relationships that were current or former partners. Our findings indicated that separation preceded 37.5 % of the cases where the wife was murdered and was the most frequent motivation when the offender murdered his intimate partner. Separation has been believed to be the most dangerous time for an abused woman (Brownridge 2006). It is possible honor crimes committed during the process of separation are one type of domestic violence homicides. Given the offender's control in honor crimes is premised on honor and shame that is believed to derive from cultural or religious justifications (Baker et al. 1999; Gill 2009), these cases may be viewed as more newsworthy than other domestic violence homicides. Research examining media coverage of homicide generally and coverage of homicides involving intimate partners specifically have consistently found that situational circumstances greatly impact the newsworthiness of a particular event (Gruenewald et al. 2013, 2009).

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

Gill (2008) has argued that honor crimes are one type of violence against women. There is a broad range of behaviors that can fall under the heading of honor-based violence and has,

thus, complicated efforts to create a singular definition (Welchman and Hossain 2005). Similarly, our study was limited to honor crimes that resulted in a homicide and was unable to explore the broad range of behaviors that fall under honor-based violence.

When reviewing cases for inclusion, we came across additional cases that had the potential to meet the inclusion criteria but also had unique characteristics that precluded their classification as an honor crime. In two additional incidents, the offender's behavior, and not the victim's behavior, was thought to have shamed the family. Therefore, these cases did not meet the inclusion criteria because the victim did not violate honor codes. In these cases, the woman believed she married a man who was committed to Islam but who in actuality was not. When each of these men was confronted by their brother-in-laws about their devotion to their religion, the offender shot their in-laws. In one of these cases, the ex-wife was shot during a child custody dispute and further highlights the difficulty in identifying and classifying honor crimes.

Moreover, based on the data collected here, offenders of honor crimes murdered individuals beyond their primary target. Future research should be directed at the role of third parties in honor crimes. Prior research has shown family members are actively involved in the commission of the crime (Kulwicksi 2002). Our findings indicated this does not seem to be the case in the United States. Instead, extended family members were more likely to be victimized. The shame of the woman's behavior may extend beyond her to other family members who spent a significant amount of time with the victim and/or lived with her.

This study's findings on the motivations for American honor crimes differed from the reasons for honor crimes in other countries (see for e.g. Doğan 2014a; Kulwicksi 2002). Through court records and quotes made to the police, the data collected in this study showed many of the offenders provided justifications or rationalizations for their crimes beyond the overarching motivations identified. In a previous study, Doğan (2014c) conducted interviews with offenders of honor crimes to provide perspective into their behavior preceding the commission of the crime. Doğan (2014c) noted that within the offender's narrative, techniques of neutralization emerged, including denying the victim and appealing to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957). An avenue for future research is to analyze these open-source materials for themes based on neutralization theory to provide greater context to offender motivations.

For most of our cases, the primary open source documents uncovered were newspaper articles. Reporters approach stories with general expectation of the circumstances and frame a story accordingly. It is possible that reporters would have framed the story differently if the victim and/or offender were not ethnic Middle Easterners. To provide a preliminary investigation of this we systematically used the ECDB search

protocol to identify Indian and dowry honor crimes but could not locate a single such case that occurred in the United States since 1990. Next, we searched the ECDB, which includes all ideologically and non-ideologically motivated homicides that involve political extremists. We carefully examined each one to see if there were any intimate killings that may fit our honor crime inclusion criteria (e.g. anti-interracial romance linked to shame). We were able to find five such cases. We then pulled the open source information that the ECDB had on them and conducted in depth follow up media searches to see if we could document any media stories that framed them as honor crimes. Importantly, we could not find any stories with this frame even though they met our definition and comparable cases, like the ones studied here involving Middle Easterners, were framed as honor crimes. Reporters may search for an 'honor crime' angle when the victim and/or offender are of a particular ethnicity or religion. There is a need to study honor crimes in the United States that involve victims and perpetrators from other cultures, like India, or extremist ideologies.

One potential limitation in this study is that only the first author coded all the honor crimes. Having multiple coders could have improved reliability. Despite this potential limitation, when there was a question about coding or inclusion of a case the first author contacted the other two authors. The authors discussed the issue until a unanimous decision was reached. Most questions that arose focused on including or excluding a case. The pre-specified coding scheme and training protocols for the ECDB improved validity when it came to coding cases.

Policy Implications

Perpetrators of honor crimes may seek support from extended family members (Baker et al. 1999). Therefore, policy should focus on the role of the community. Parallel systems of justice based on the communities where honor crimes happen (Gill 2009) not only hold the offender criminally accountable, but also have an effect on his status within the community. Community accountability models and coordinated community responses have been recommended for domestic violence (Douglas et al. 2008). Restorative justice may also serve to empower victims and increase community strength to limit honor crimes (Barner and Carney 2011). Programs need to be culturally competent and to be created with input from community members.

As of now, there are limited resources and services available for women who remain in these communities despite the risk of honor crimes (Gill 2009). It is important to consider how structural forces impact the woman's experience and the options available to her (Carlson 1984). Sokoloff (2008) has argued that Western cultures tend to concentrate on what the Western cultures believe are the negative aspects of an

ethnicity. Yet, Yoshioka and Choi (2005) have proposed that we should look to the woman's culture for ways to respond to violence. Structural reforms must occur so that the focus is not just on changing the individual (Sokoloff 2008) but instead on identifying ways to help victims while holding the perpetrator accountable for his behavior. Strengths of the culture can be identified as a way to hold the abuser accountable and can be integrated into victim services. Kulwicki et al. (2010) identified cultural competent strategies to aid in the design of intimate partner violence programs and services for Arab women and can be used in the creation of programs to address honor crimes. The evaluation of these programs, especially as they relate to the prevention of honor crimes, is a viable area for future research. Nevertheless, for the program to be successful, individuals in the community must be involved in the process and begin to challenge long-held beliefs regarding honor crimes.

Conclusion

Despite the attention on honor crimes in the media, there is a lack of academic research on the topic (Kulczycki and Windle 2011). Using an open-source protocol, we were only able to identify 16 honor crimes over a 24-year period within the United States. The primary motivation behind these cases were the perpetrator's former partner beginning the process of separation and the westernized behavior of the victim, typically a daughter or step-daughter. The findings from the current study indicated the motivation of the offense along with the relationship between the victim and offender must be considered since offenders murdered individuals in the name of honor outside their primary target. Overall, the characteristics of honor crimes in the United States maintain some similarities from documented international honor crimes (Doğan 2014a), but differences also emerged. It is hoped that future research continues to investigate this important area.

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